DOE News Release
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 19, 2006

NEWS MEDIA CONTACT:
Mike Waldron, 202-586-4940

DOE Technology Helps NASA Seek "New Horizons"

WASHINGTON, D.C.—The New Horizons spacecraft, powered by deep space battery technology developed by the Department of Energy's national laboratories, was successfully launched today from Florida's Kennedy Space Center on a 9 ½ year journey to explore Pluto and its moons. The spacecraft will receive heat and electricity from a long-lasting plutonium-238 powered generator developed and assembled by scientists and engineers at the Idaho, Oak Ridge and Los Alamos National Laboratories.

"This is an amazing mission when you think about the time, distance and harsh environment that the spacecraft will encounter," said Secretary of Energy Samuel Bodman. "Developing the technology to sustain the instruments in deep space over a long period of time required America's best and brightest minds. I'm honored that our labs' scientists and engineers could play such a significant role in helping to make this mission a success."

For the mission, the Department of Energy developed and delivered a radioisotope thermoelectric generator, or "RTG." This "space battery" provides an uninterrupted and reliable source of heat and electricity in remote and harsh environments such as deep space. The RTG will provide power and heat for many years to the New Horizons spacecraft and its on-board scientific equipment through the radioactive decay of nuclear material. Heat generated by the radioactive decay of plutonum-238 is converted into electricity by solid-state thermoelectrics.

RTGs provided by DOE have enabled American scientists to explore the solar system for many years. Prior to New Horizons, the Apollo missions to the Moon, the Viking missions to Mars, and the Pioneer, Voyager, Ulysses, Galileo and Cassini missions to the outer solar system all used this safe, efficient and long-lasting power source.

For more details on the New Horizons mission, visit the NASA Web site at www.nasa.gov. Additional information on the Department's role in developing nuclear energy technologies for space exploration may be found at the Office of Nuclear Energy, Science and Technology's Web site, www.nuclear.gov.

-DOE-

News Release Archive